

Law Enforcement–Mental Health Learning Sites

Jurisdictions across the country are exploring strategies to improve the outcomes of encounters between law enforcement and people with mental illnesses. As a growing number of communities develop or enhance their comprehensive police-mental health collaboration (PMHC), many agencies are struggling with the planning process and how to tailor successful implementation strategies from other jurisdictions to address their own distinct problems and circumstances.

In an effort to expand the knowledge base for law enforcement agencies interested in starting or enhancing a PMHC, the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, with assistance from a team of national experts and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), selected six police departments to serve as national law enforcement–mental health learning sites. These learning sites represent a diverse cross-section of perspectives and program examples and are dedicated to helping other jurisdictions improve their responses to people with mental illnesses. The original six learning sites, selected in 2010, are the Houston (TX) Police Department, the Los Angeles (CA) Police Department, the Madison (WI) Police Department, the Portland (ME) Police Department, the Salt Lake City (UT) Police Department, and the University of Florida Police Department. In 2017, due to the success of the program, four new sites were added, including the Arlington Police Department (MA), the Gallia, Jackson, Meigs Counties Sheriffs’ Offices (OH), the Madison County Sheriff’s Office (TN), and the Tucson Police Department (AZ).

Houston (TX) Police Department

Total number of agency personnel: 6,354

Sworn: 5,121 **Civilian:** 1,249

Total population served: 2.3 million people

Jurisdiction and state: Houston, Texas

Program Highlights

- Features a [multi-faceted strategy](#) that includes crisis intervention-trained (CIT) patrol officers, co-responder units, a Homeless Outreach Team, a Boarding Homes Enforcement Detail, a Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative, a Crisis Call Diversion program, a Senior Justice Assessment Center, and trained dispatchers and call takers
- Provides [mental health training for all officers](#) that includes:
 - 40-hour Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for all cadets
 - 8-hour annual advanced CIT classes
 - State-mandated 8-hour CIT refresher training for all officers who only have Basic Peace Officer Certification
 - 40-hour Mental Health Peace Officer class for veteran police officers
 - State-mandated 40-hour CIT class for Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced state certifications
 - State-mandated 8-hour De-esclation class for all cadets, Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced state certifications
 - 24-hour Crisis Communications class for tele-communicators (e.g., dispatchers and call-takers)

| 1991 | 1999 | 2008 | 2009 | 2011 | 2013 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| LE/MH Collaboration | Crisis Intervention | Crisis Intervention Response Team | Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative | Homeless Outreach Team | Boarding Homes Enforcement and MH Unit elevated to Division | 911 Crisis Call Division Program | Senior Justice Assessment Center |

The Houston Police Department (HPD) has collaborated with local mental health personnel since 1991. It has steadily built on this foundation by implementing the many programs detailed below.

Law Enforcement—Mental Health Learning Sites

Houston (TX) Police Department

HPD collaborates with mental health professionals and advocacy groups in Houston and Harris County in its PMHC. For example, the HPD's Mental Health Division works with community partners such as The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, Mental Health America of Greater Houston, and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Greater Houston, to improve its response to people with mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders.

Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT)

The CIRT, which started in 2008, serves as Houston's highest-level response to people in serious mental health crisis. The co-response program partners a Houston CIT officer with a masters-level licensed clinician from The Harris Center. CIRT supports officers in the field, responds to CIT calls for service, is present at SWAT calls, conducts jail assessments, and performs proactive and follow-up investigations.

Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative (CCSI)

This program identifies people who are in frequent contact with HPD officers and pairs them with a mental health case manager. CCSI, launched in 2009, is designed to divert people from jail when appropriate by addressing the underlying causes of the people in crisis who have repeat contact with police. Case managers work to stabilize people with chronic mental illnesses by helping to meet their basic treatment and other needs. CCSI has won a number of prestigious awards from national policing groups and has demonstrated that participants have fewer and shorter in-patient stays and less contact with police when effective mental health diversion techniques are put into place in police departments.

Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)

The Homeless Outreach Team has worked collaboratively since 2011 with community organizations to provide services—such as housing, medical care, and mental health treatment—to people who are homeless. HOT has received several foundation donations to support their efforts to provide services and help find housing for these individuals. In 2015 alone, the team made nearly 13,000 referrals to provider agencies and obtained temporary and permanent housing for more than 290 individuals.

Boarding Homes Enforcement Detail (BHED)

Houston passed a city ordinance in July 2013 that regulated unlicensed boarding homes, many of which provide housing for people with mental illnesses. The Detail works to ensure these boarding homes are meeting city codes, including investigating criminal activity, abuse, and fraud. They have also provided boarding home owners and staff with training on mental illnesses, de-escalation techniques, and the Texas Mental Health Code.

Crisis Call Diversion Program

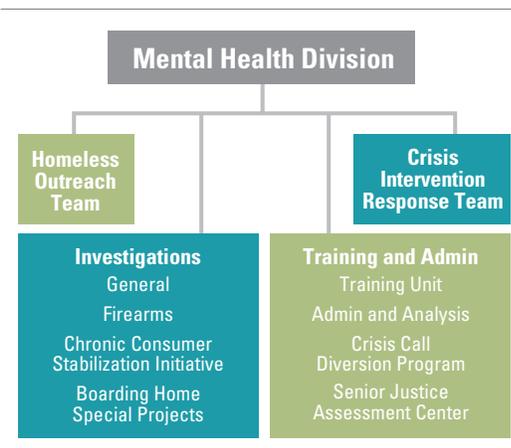
This innovative pilot program, which began in March 2015, brings helpline crisis counselors from The Harris Center for Mental Health into the Houston Emergency Center (HEC), Houston/Harris County's dispatch center. The diversion program addresses the significant number of calls involving individuals experiencing serious mental health crises with no criminal nexus, that can be addressed by professional crisis counselors rather than dispatching a patrol unit.

Senior Justice Assessment Center

This program uses a multi-disciplinary team of professionals to address elder and dependent adult cases of abuse, which often include victims with dementia.

Investigations Unit/Special Projects

This unit analyzes every police report pertaining to mental illness and inputs these incidents into a database. If follow up is necessary, it makes the necessary referrals, initiates any investigative action, and supports other teams as needed. In addition, this unit handles any firearm seizures in a mental health crisis in accordance with state and federal law. The Special Projects section of the unit identifies new collaborative opportunities and continues to seek opportunities to develop programs that allow HPD to better serve its community.



To learn more about the HPD and its initiatives, please contact:

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To learn more about the Law Enforcement/Mental Health Learning Sites, please visit <http://csgjusticecenter.org/law-enforcement/projects/mental-health-learning-sites/> or email the Law Enforcement Program team at le-mh-learningsites@csgjusticecenter.org.